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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the philosophic basis of "play" in physical education. The discussion considers: (1) current and historical perspectives of "play" in physical education; (2) why physical educators have an aversion to any "play" in their classrooms; and (3) the immediate need for the play-directed experience to be the cornerstone of physical education. It is shown that while the concept of play is antithetical to many physical educators, connoting unproductiveness and limited learning possibilities, play should be a vital part of physical education as well as all motor learning experiences because play is the basis for skill acquisition. (JD)

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RUNNING HEAD: Why Not Play?

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Why Not Play in Physical Education?[1]

As physical educators, we have an aversion to any 'Play' in our classrooms. The concept of play is antithetical to many physical educators since the word play connotes the feeling of 1) unproductiveness (nothing objective is learned in play), 2) non-worth (play participation has no material reward), and 3) limited learning possibilities (learning can only be evaluated through objective criterion, since subjective learning is dubious in play).

Yet, play should be a vital part of physical education as well as all motor learning experiences since play is the basis for skill acquisition. In play we are completely involved; we think, move, challenge, and explore. We learn to control our body movements through time and space, with and against gravity. Specifically we know play to be free and voluntary, spatially and temporally separate, uncertain in outcome, make-believe in quality, and unproductive in an utilitarian sense (Callois, 1961, pp.9-10). These non-utilitarian qualities are essential in life as well as physical education since play "...preceded any formalized teaching" (Kretchmar & Harper, 1969, pp.57-58).

In a world of inadequacies play brings a "temporary limited perfection" into our lives (Huizinga, 1950, p. 54). The experience is intensely absorbing and all encompassing. But most importantly, each individual achieves, succeeds,

and learns within the play experience. Learning occurs because of our perception of the experience."to play means to accept the paradox of pursuing what is at once essential and inconsequential" (Levy, 1978, p. 1). Play is experiential, sensual, and irrational. Any attempt to rationalize play logically is to detract from the meaning of the experience itself since the results cannot be measured objectively (Callois, 1961). The qualities inherent in play are intangible and often deviate from rational criteria.

The purpose of this a paper is to examine the philosophic basis of 'play' in physical education. Specifically, this argument will discuss: 1) current and historical perspectives of 'play' in physical education, 2) why we as physical educators have an aversion to any 'play' in our classrooms, and 3) the immediate need for the play directed experience to be, as Kretchmar and Harper (1969) said, the "cornerstone" of physical education.

Play, Physical Education, and the Work Ethic

Unfortunately, play finds disfavor in a society managed by the 'Protestant Work Ethic' (Van Dalen, 1971). The work ethic encourages productivity, not unproductive play, as a fundamental seriousness of life. Our society places emphasis on achievement, success, technological superiority, and the value of hard work. Work criteria can be objectively measured, easily displayed, and logically obtained.

This emphasis on objective, productive work even influences our historically play-directed profession. Originally, physical education emphasized play in relation to skill acquisition, development of physical fitness, improved mechanical efficiency, and the values gained from social interactions. "Play is the cornerstone of the profession...." was readily accepted as the means to the complete individual (Kretchmar & Harper, 1969, pp. 57-58).

Hetherington (1915), Williams (1964), Wood (1910), Dewey (1966), and others emphasized play as nature's method of education. "Because education, in its broadest sense, is identical with the process of living... it is learning how to live through experience" (Hetherington, 1915, pp. 84-85). Physical education according to these early philosophers, was to take over "... nature's means of education..." by organizing play toward the "...highest educational values..." (Hetherington, 1915, pp.84-85). "The subject matter of physical education... [reconstructed to satisfy educational needs] is to be found in play" (Wood, 1910, pp.84-85).

However we modern professionals feel we must work in an organized manner to pursue more knowledge about physical education. Work is considered an essentially serious routine that is highly structured and directed towards a common goal-- more knowledge and more efficiency. Consequently, since play has no material gain and is held in low esteem by our present work oriented society, play in

physical education is now abrogated. We uphold that physical education must not be equated with the non-serious; rather physical education must be equated with work, seriousness, and objective results.

A review of current foundation texts supports this thesis. Physical education is generally not defined in any sense that is related to play. Physical education is "the art and science of human movement" (Felshin, 1972, pp.3-12). Physical education is "...that phase of the total process of education which is concerned with the development and utilization of the individual's voluntary, purposeful movement capabilities, and with directly related mental, emotional, and social responses" (Nixon & Jewett, 1980, p. 27). "Physical education is a process through which favorable adaptations and learnings-- organic, neuromuscular, intellectual, social, cultural, emotional, and aesthetic-- result from and proceed through selected and fairly vigorous physical activities" (Baley & Field, 1976, p. 4). And, "[p]hysical education seeks to develop each person's whole being by the use of physical means, which is a characteristic that physical education shares with no other area of education" (Freeman, 1982, p. 5). Seldom, if any, present physical education scholars emphasize the importance of play or the play-directed activity, except in elementary physical education texts.

This is unfortunate since in the broadest sense, physical education is directed play with movement as its

foundation. And, each movement within this directed play involves cognitive, psychomotor, and affective elements. For instance, play in the cognitive domain develops knowledge concerning why and how we participate and an understanding of ourselves in relation to the universe. In addition, the affective domain increases awareness of the aesthetic, the enjoyment, and personal meaning within the plat experience. And finally, the psychomotor domain involves an interaction of muscles and mind as the body moves in and through time and space, with and against gravity. The very essence of these domains has spawned considerable research with resulting scientific data. However, the energies directed toward tangible scientific results often forget or neglect the importance of the tangible.

Fragmentation within Physical Education

Obviously, the scientific, the tangible, and the concrete are essential to understand the body as it participates. But, why must the scientific and the applied be the only foci of the physical education experience? Is it because we need or needed a defense against academic and societal criticism? In the 1960's the profession and the discipline began its orientation away from its play cornerstone and toward scientific analysis. Academe as well as a work-related society challenged physical education to defend its worth with objective data (Ingham, 1986; Sheehan, 1984; Vanderwaag, 1983). The profession responded with a

division of the discipline into various subdisciplines such as exercise physiology, sport psychology, biomechanics, pedagogy, philosophy, history, and administration. The focus changed from experiential play to psychological, anatomical, biomechanical, physiological, pedagogical, historical, and philosophical normative standards.

As the discipline expanded, the scientific base became more categorized. Researchers found that praise and intellectual stimulation was equated with work-related technical sciences (Ingham, 1986). As the body of scientific knowledge grew, specialization and categorization increased until today many researchers in the subdisciplines have no backgrounds in physical education per se. That is, biomechanists, physiologists, and physicians do the research in exercise physiology. Psychologists and sociologists study the psychosocial aspect of sport. Historians and philosophers examine the purpose, past, and nature of man as s/he participates or has participated in sport. Pedagogists study the interaction of teacher, learner, and subject matter.

Unfortunately, everything about human movement is now objectively studied and analyzed-- including play. For example, Barnett (1976, p.14) emphasizes a need "...for more extensive and controlled research in children's play". In addition, Wade (1976), Stone and Stone (1976), and Suttie and Shearer (1976), encourage systematic observation of children's play activities to increase our objective

knowledge about the psycological and sociological meaning of the play experience. Directed play in the gymnasium has become a means to an end rather than a means to the experience. Little concern is directed toward personal meaning or significance of the activity. Play as an internal, subjective phenomenon no longer exits in physical education.

Unfortunately, if play is researched for personal meanings, it is done so psychologically. The philosophic perspective of play in physical education is ignored. Is it because we professionals are unable to find logical rationalization for directed play? Or, is it because the subdiscipline of sport philosophy parrots the dominant paradigm of the parent discipline and studies play outside the realm of physical education (Ingham, 1986)? Or is it because many sport philosophers are no longer physical educators? Instead, they are universal philosophers who have little interest in our discipline. Or is it because our physical education preparation classes are so structured that we have lost sight of our purpose or are unwilling to defend the phenomenon of play?

Many of us joined the physical education profession because we enjoyed learning through physical activity, and had "...exciting encounters, either past or present, with some form of play" (Kretchmar & Harper, 1969, p.57-58). Unfortunately, once we are given the 'reins' as classroom teachers or laboratory researchers we become systematic in

deciding the values and concepts to be learned. Oftentimes this philosophic change occurs because we have a preconceived notion of how we should act, how our classes should be structured, what methods should be presented, how curriculum should be formulated, and how objectives should be developed. After all, work oriented administrations show favor toward organization and disfavor toward what 'appears' to be disorganization. Consequently, in an organized systematic classroom, laboratory, or playing field, learning is more easily evaluated through objective measures. Needless to say, the play experience and the subjective experience have diminished in the classroom.

Play as the Cornerstone

The true worth of the play experience in physical education can only be evaluated by the participant as s/he delves into the whole body, mind, and soul experience. To become a part is to become involved with the totality of existence. Unfortunately, the direction of physical education toward the scientific reduces the play experience to the objective. Physical education research has aided in improving performance levels and an awareness of the body's physical needs, but has failed to promote the inner enjoyment, self-awareness or self-fulfillment. Individuals who play for life do so for internal, intrinsic rewards rather than objective, scientific results. If the directed play activity is enjoyed, participation will continue long after a class experience is completed.

Play and Personal Philosophic Meaning

The purpose and meaning of play is limitless. "Pleasure and education are not mutually exclusive; they can and should exist together" (Freeman, 1982, p.6). In other words, play can be pure enjoyment, solely educational, or a healthy combination of the two. Play, through physical activity, is the mode in which we learn to express, understand, and extend ourselves to the world.

During play, whether sport of physical education, I am unaware of my feelings and unable to comprehend the immense values and qualities of the experience. If I 'try', the phenomenon diminishes or disappears. Afterwards I attempt to detach myself from the experience with precision. Through this non-sophisticated application of phenomenology, I learn exactly how and why the experience manifests itself in me.

For example, when I sail I feel the pull of the mainsheet in my hands and the spray breaking across the bow which gives meaning, direction, and purpose. I can feel the craft move to my every command, free to determine speed, direction, and intensity. The wind pushes, the experience intensifies, and the element of a new dimension is felt. The wind lifts the boat, I lean back, muscles tightening. I am at one with the experience, at one with nature. The battle is between myself and the wind; there is no stopping; the flow is constant, the existence limitless.

Consequently, the experience generates a new perception of abilities and an increased awareness of the possibilities.

I may be increasing strength, physiological and biomechanical advantages, but they are secondary to the experience. The drive is from within, the challenge to fulfill an emotional inner feeling of knowing self. Efficiency of body and motion is important, but the force is the need to understand myself in relation to the experience.

Each subjective play experience in physical education increases my awareness to infinite potentials. I can never know total eternal existence; but through education of the subjective and objective stimuli the reality of self will emerge. I can use the knowledge gained from each play experience to develop a more meaningful living. The educational structure of play, joined by the uncertainty, enhances my ability to understand the meaning between myself, the environment, and my potential.

Play as an Immediate Priority in Physical Education

The subjective, experiential essence of play can and should occur not only in sport but in physical education. The student is a subjective being who needs time and the opportunity to experience the self in movement. Physical education is not entirely controlled by objective and efficient movement. We must remember that children in elementary physical education 'play' low organized games not only for objective criteria such as skill acquisition, but also because the play experience encourages bodily

understanding, movement potential, and meaning for being in relation to their surrounding world. In junior and senior high school physical education, students 'play' games that are highly structured. more complex, and governed by standardized rules. However, efficiency, complexity, rules, and improving human performance should not be the only end. This experiential play should also provide expression, creativity, and uniqueness.

We as physical educators need to reevaluate our goals and philosophies of physical education. The 'oneness' with the motion and the intense joy and delight need to be present in enthusiastic quantities within our classroom. Scientific research is important and principles should be taught; but individuals will find little worth if the experience is unsatisfying. In reevaluation we must remember that our priorities should rest with the individual's perception and enjoyment of the play-directed experience. Specifically "...the concept of play could acquire a central rather than a peripheral role in the field of physical education" (Bain, 1976, p.79). The stimuli from the environment, events, people, and infinite possibilities will help us to become whole.

A Child in P.E.

Give a child a ball,
And s/he will play.
Give a child direction,
And s/he will learn and explore.
Encourage play and the child will enjoy,
Participate, and learn for a lifetime.

-Beller-

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[1] This paper purposively is written using we, the third person plural pronoun, to signify we, physical educators. Obviously, not all physical educators are dualistic or are alien to the holistic play experience. However, to make a definitive statement, the use of "we" is used for stylization and to make an explicit point.

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